



SPRING/SUMMER 2016



## Jackpot

# Former NJDOC Administrator and Family Win Powerball Lottery

It was the first Saturday in May, and darkness had descended when Valerie Arthur received the telephone call that would change her life.

"It was my sister, Marsha," recalled Arthur, whose 27-year career with the New Jersey Department of Corrections ended in June 2015 with her retirement as administrator of Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women.

"My sister asked me if I knew who won the Powerball lottery," she continued. "I said, 'Who?' When she replied that we won, I thought it was a joke. I told her to stop April fooling me. She said, 'It's May,' and if I don't believe her, then I should ask Mommy. So I did."

Mommy – Pearl Smith – confirmed to Arthur that she was indeed in possession of the winning ticket, which she purchased at a 7-Eleven in Trenton. The jackpot, valued at nearly \$430 million, would be split among Smith and her seven adult children.

Powerball is played in 44 states as well as Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The prize was the largest ever won by a single New Jersey Lottery ticket.

According to Arthur, the winning numbers – 5, 25, 26, 44, 66, and Powerball number 9 – came to her mother in a dream. Incredibly, Smith penciled the winning numbers on a slip of paper in the exact order in which they were drawn. The odds of winning the lottery were one in 292.2 million. The odds of selecting the correct numbers in order were, obviously, substantially higher.



VALERIE ARTHUR

"Divine intervention," Arthur stated. "Really, there's no other explanation."

It wasn't until nearly a week later that Arthur and her family were introduced to the public during a May 13 press conference at New Jersey Lottery headquarters in Lawrenceville. By then, an attorney for the family had put in place what he referred to as a dream team of advisors, including experts in taxes, finances and estates.

It was decided that a foundation, to be overseen by a still-to-be-determined family member, would be established to enable a portion of the lottery winnings to support charitable endeavors. The family also opted to receive the prize in a lump-sum payout of \$284 million.

"Even though there was a lot of excitement, I don't know if any of us actually believed it was true until the Lottery Commission validated the ticket," said Arthur, who served as the family spokesperson during the press conference. "That was when it finally started to sink in."

"I suppose I'm no different than anyone else. I always dreamed of winning the lottery, but I was never an avid player. None of us in the family are big gamblers. In fact, we all chipped in for the tickets, even though we only spent a total of \$6. All I can say is, I'm sure glad we decided to play."

As if May 2016 hasn't already been a memorable month for Arthur, last weekend, she received her doctorate in Prison Policy and Restorative Justice from New Brunswick Theological Seminary. She hopes to open a Bible studies institute that will focus on urban ministries. She expects her share of the lottery winnings to help transform her goal into reality.

"I'm also going to use the money to pay off the student loans I acquired, to pay off my mortgage and to give some money to the church," Arthur said. "Beyond that, I'll play it by ear."

However, she and the others in her family have no intentions of shining a spotlight on their future plans. Interview requests from a host of media outlets – among them Good Morning America, The Ellen DeGeneres Show, CNN and Fox News – were politely declined.

Yet, Arthur was quick to point out that the interviews weren't turned down because she was uncomfortable in her role as spokeswoman for the family.

"When I was speaking on behalf of my family, I felt like I was back in my element, overseeing things," she said with a chuckle. "The time I spent in Corrections, especially as an administrator, came in handy."

"For example, I made sure I was well prepared for the press conference at the Lottery headquarters," she added. "I need to thank Commissioner [Gary] Lanigan, because I found myself thinking back to the CHANGE (Challenge Historical Assumptions Nobly Generating Efficiencies) meetings. After those meetings, the press conference didn't seem to be that difficult. I was no more nervous than I was at a CHANGE meeting."





**Ready, Set...**

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## Instructor Has Been Molding Trainees Into Correction Officers Since 2001

Senior Correction Officer Edward Ellis and his colleagues at the Correctional Staff Training Academy have long since lost track of how much time they've spent getting trainees to grasp the importance of teamwork. They insist that trainees think in terms of "we" instead of "I."



*Senior Correction Officer Edward Ellis has been part of the Correctional Staff Training Academy since 2001.*

Photo by Chris Carden

Unfortunately, it is not an easy lesson to impart.

"I'll walk into the barracks, and a trainee's shoes are [lined up] backwards," said Ellis, a former Army drill sergeant who has served as an instructor at the Training Academy since 2001.

"Everyone else's shoes are straight," he continued. "Why is that? If we, as instructors, see it, the others in the barracks had to see it, too.

"So we'll mess up everybody's shoes until

they understand that they have to come together as a team. Either they're all right, or they're all wrong. It's a matter of making sure they're in the proper

mindset before they leave here and get to an institution, because if they're not, that could create all kinds of problems."

Two decades ago, Ellis was learning lessons at the Training Academy, not teaching them. He had recently retired from the Army after 21 years of military service and, after a yearlong stint as an employee at a juvenile detention center, he went to work for the New Jersey Department of Corrections.

"We're a paramilitary organization, and after my time in the Army, this seemed like a good fit for me," the 61-year-old Ellis related. "When I went through the Academy, I had instructors who were younger than me."

One of his instructors was Wayne Manstream, who is now a major and the highest-ranking member of the Training Academy's custody staff.

"We go back a long way, and it's hard for me to even express how much Eddie has meant to me and to so many others," Manstream said. "He's *that* guy, the one who everybody goes to in order to get something done. He's almost like the heart and soul of the Academy."

Training Academy Director Guy Cirillo wholeheartedly agrees.

"There are teachers you come across while you're in school that you'll never forget," Cirillo said. "It's no different here at the Academy. If you ask the last 14 or 15 years of recruits their enduring memories of the Academy, Eddie's name will be mentioned over and over again. He'll be one of the common denominators. His impact has been – and continues to be – nothing short of remarkable.

"When I first got here back in 2002, I'd already had quite a bit of experience in the department, but I was in an all-new environment. From the very beginning, Eddie extended his hand to me and let me know that he'd do whatever he could to help. For all these years, I've been proud to call him a friend."

Cirillo is not alone. Men and women throughout the NJDOC cherish their friendship with Ellis.

Ironically, Ellis doesn't believe that making friends is part of his job description. Rather, his focus is to transform trainees into elite correction officers.

"For the first six weeks, we're extremely tough on the trainees," he said.

"That's when they might resent us. After the first six weeks or so, we slowly but surely start building them up and emphasizing what needs to be done to become a correction officer. Sometimes, you get a new class, and they look terrible. Yet, they progress, they become motivated, and eventually, it all comes together. You may start with 240 trainees and finish with 180, but those 180 are the cream of the crop.

"It's important to stress discipline, because if they're not disciplined here, they're not going to be disciplined in the prisons," he added. "That said, I



always treat everyone the same, and I never disrespect someone as a person.

"Since I've been here, I've helped put two of my son's friends through the Academy, I've put a niece through here and put several children of my friends through. Once they got here, I treated them the same way that I treated the others in the class. I make it a point to be consistent from one day to the next."

Ellis makes sure the recruits understand that correction officers represent the department both in and out of the workplace.

"I tell them that when they get to their institutions, follow the lead of those veteran officers who are interested in teaching and setting a professional example at all times," he pointed out. "The officers who might call you 'rookie' in a disparaging manner or play games that could jeopardize your safety aren't the ones you want to follow."

"I also let them know that the job doesn't end when you leave the institution. If I walk into a store and encounter an officer I helped put through the Academy, and he looks terrible, it's not just me who notices. To the public, that person might as well be the face of Corrections. That's why we, as Corrections professionals, need to convey a positive image at all times."

It was a lesson that Jason Franks, an officer at the Central Reception and Assignment Facility and a member of Class 235, remembers well.

"One of the many things I learned from SCO Ellis is that it doesn't only matter what you do when someone is watching," he said. "It also matters what you do when no one is watching,"

Ellis is proud of the fact that his value system was largely formed during his years in the military, where he received a Bronze Star for valor, denoting participation in an act of heroism involving conflict with an armed enemy. The incident for which he was recognized took place during Operation Desert Storm.

"At the time, large numbers of Iraqi soldiers were surrendering to our platoon and others," Ellis recalled. "We'd take their weapons and confine the soldiers. Anyway, these two Iraqi soldiers acted as if they were surrendering, but they were behaving strangely."

"We had two soldiers – our point men – approaching them to get their weapons, but it just didn't feel right, so I called our soldiers back. As soon as I did, the two Iraqis opened fire on us. It turned out that they were waiting for our point men to get close enough so that they could shoot them."

The split-second decision Ellis made saved the lives of at least two members of his platoon.

"It's like I tell the trainees, being part of a team means having each other's backs," he stated.

Said Cirillo: "It's a privilege for those of us at the Academy to be able to say Eddie Ellis is the backbone of what we do."

Members of the Training Academy staff recently spent a few weeks in a prison setting to make certain they were as familiar as possible with the operations of the facilities. Like most of his colleagues, Ellis enjoyed his stay, but he got the impression that some of his co-workers at the prison were rather uncomfortable.

"As soon as I arrived, people were asking me why I wasn't at the Academy," he said, chuckling. "It was as if everyone thought the Academy is where I belong."

Precisely.





## Lifelines

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# FAST Responses Designed for Active Shooter Incidents

Two officers suited up in fireproof uniforms on an open field, preparing for what appeared to be a challenging assignment. They fastened their outer vests, which were filled with items they may need to use: glow sticks, flashlights, additional magazines, and Z-Pak gauze for gunshot wounds.

Senior Correction Officer Scott Ellis laid on the ground, pointing a suppressed rifle at a target, while his partner, Senior Correction Officer Rich Kalbach, was to his right, looking through binoculars.

Fortunately, the officers were just training at a session.

However, if an actual active shooter incident were to take place at a public location, where lives were at stake, Ellis, Kalbach and their fellow staff members would be prepared, because they regularly fine-tune the skills necessary to take down a shooter. That's because they are part of the most recently established unit of the Special Operations Group (SOG): the Forward Area Strike Team (FAST).

True to its acronym, FAST must respond quickly to prevent the loss of innocent life in a highly charged, violent predicament.



*SCO Scott Ellis, front, and SCO Rich Kalbach practice a drill at a training session of the Forward Area Strike Team.*

Lieutenant Frank Martin, commanding officer of FAST, which currently has 25 members, said there is one major difference between FAST and the other SOG units.

"We train exclusively for lethal situations and for mitigation of the shooter," Martin said.

FAST was formed in February 2015. While the unit has worked on high-risk security details, Martin said FAST hasn't been dispatched to an actual active shooter incident. He credited the New Jersey Department of Corrections for being proactive.

"It is a response to something that could potentially happen," Martin said. "It's a relief that the department took the stance to create this team. They made sure we were provided with the safest, most secure and advanced technology."

Numerous active shooter incidents have taken place in recent years, most recently on June 12 at a nightclub in Orlando, Fla., that claimed the lives of at least 50 people. A 2014 FBI report stated that 160 active shooter incidents occurred in the United States between 2000 and 2013, killing 486 people and injuring 557 individuals. Among them is the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in December 2012. Other active shooter attacks have taken place in movie theaters, college campuses, malls, a supermarket, military bases and offices.

FAST's mission is to address such incidents with specialized skills in weapons training, logistical support, and adaptability. It operates out of three regional areas, with each regional squad consisting of eight operators. As commanding officer, Martin oversees all three squads.

Each operator has a particular position. Those positions include team leader, medic, breacher, ballistics shield operator, designated marksman, a canine unit officer, a Special Investigations Division investigator and a tactical operator.

"I believe FAST could serve as a deterrent," Martin said. "Just the existence of the unit sends a signal to anyone considering causing harm to the general public."

All FAST operators carry primary and secondary weapons. The members primarily work on their specialty. However, Martin said most members are cross-trained.

"We don't utilize a rank system," Martin noted. "Each operator can take on the other's role in an emergency situation."

FAST has many pieces of equipment at its disposal. For example, the breacher, whose objective is to gain access to the building where the active shooter incident is taking place, uses tools like bolt cutters and a splitting maul, which is a combination of a sledgehammer and an axe. Sometimes, the breacher can be expected to use a battering ram, which weighs some 80 pounds, and may even be tasked with employing explosives to gain access.

FAST members devote an average of 20 hours a month to training. A recent low-light operation took place from 5 p.m. to midnight.

"We concentrate a lot on accuracy and efficiency in the use of our weapons systems, while training in patterns of movement to clear areas and buildings," Martin said.

Kalbach is the central squad's ballistics shield operator. He is an officer at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility and has served in the Army.

"Basically, it is about saving lives," he said about FAST.

He described the differences of working as a member of FAST and that of a corrections officer.

"[With FAST,] you're out in the real world with civilians present, with a firearm threat being a lot higher," Kalbach said. "When you're working inside an institution, a threat also is present. But it's not active. With FAST, you are responding to an active threat."

The ability to adjust on the fly is among the most important characteristics members need in order to be effective in FAST.

"You have to adapt," Martin said. "It's a dynamic situation, information keeps coming in. You have to have a positive attitude and put aside the emotions to accomplish a goal."

In case the need arises, Martin noted, other law enforcement agencies could call on FAST to supplement their forces and eliminate threats.







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## Perseverance

# Special Olympics Lifted the Spirits of Athletes and Officers Alike

The recent Special Olympics Summer Games served as a fitting showcase for some 2,500 athletes to display some exemplary physical talent – and even more resilience.

Plenty of hard work is involved in planning, organizing and making sure all athletes have a positive experience at the games. One individual at the



*Sergeant Beth Westrich (right) congratulates an athlete at the Special Olympics of New Jersey Summer Games ceremony.*

forefront of the competition's logistics is Sergeant Beth Westrich, who works at the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center.

The soft-spoken sergeant views the undertaking as a labor of love. She said the athletes' reactions to meeting law enforcement personnel at the Summer Games -- which took place June 10 to June 12 at the College of New Jersey in Ewing -- makes all the effort worthwhile.

"It was spectacular," Westrich recalled. "The smiles on the kids' faces as they were being greeted by law enforcement was very special."

She estimated that some 30 NJDOC officers were on the field.

"We (the New Jersey Department of Corrections) were the most represented law enforcement agency there," she said.

Westrich has worked with Special Olympics athletes for more than three decades, extending back to her former career as a physical therapist. She's thrilled that the Special Olympics has become so prominent.

"Every year, it gets better and better," Westrich stated. "It's very touching for me to see."

On the day of the opening ceremony, Westrich, as she has done in previous years, ran a leg of the Torch Run, which raises funds and public awareness for the Special Olympics. The route in which she was a participant stretched from Island Beach State Park to Perth Amboy in Middlesex County. Getting into shape required grueling early morning workouts, she said.

When Westrich isn't physically running, she is running outreach efforts for events and programs designed to keep the Special Olympics as accessible as possible. She helps raise money for the Special Olympics by helping organize events year-round. Events include the Golf Classic, the Polar Bear Plunge and the Lincoln Tunnel 5K Challenge.

"No athlete has been turned away," she said, noting that athletes participate in the Summer Games at no cost.

The events at the Summer Games include track and field, tennis, softball, gymnastics, competitive swimming, power lifting and bocce. Athletes must be at least 8 years old to play in the Summer Games. Those who are younger can participate in the Young Athlete Program, which consists of non-competitive events that are intended to aid their physical and emotional development.

"The younger you start them, the better able they can adjust and compete," she said.

One of Westrich's goals this year was to recruit more NJDOC officers to attend the Summer Games. She believes their presence, along with other members of the law enforcement community, helped boost the athletes' morale.

One first-time participant was Sergeant Eric Vanbuskirk, who also works at ADTC. Vanbuskirk assisted athletes each time they stepped down from the podium after collecting their awards. His wife was a volunteer usher, and his son offered refreshments.

"It was fantastic and humbling. We made it a family affair," he related. "It was very rewarding, knowing that so many people looked at you in a positive light. It made me grounded and appreciative. There was nothing but positivity."

Vanbuskirk added that Westrich devotes a tremendous amount of time to organizing the games.

"The amount of dedication and personal time she devotes to it is amazing," he said. "She does it out of the kindness of her heart. It's like a second full-time job. It is amazing she has the energy to do all that."

Westrich said the respect and appreciation shown by the athletes is among the most rewarding aspects of the Summer Games.

"The biggest thing is how happy they are to see law enforcement," she said. "They understand that we're there to help them. They just light up."





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## Good Instincts

# Northern State Prison Employee Prevents Co-worker from Choking

Olga Romero couldn't believe what she was seeing.

The longtime administrative assistant at Northern State Prison and her close friend/co-worker Wanda Carrero, a community release coordinator, were out for lunch on a recent afternoon at a Brazilian restaurant in the Ironbound section of Newark.

Carrero, who ordered an entrée of steak and rice, had experienced some discomfort while swallowing. Noticing how Carrero continued struggling, Romero quickly rose from her seat and approached her.

"She started to gag. She was nodding," Romero remembered. "I got off my chair and got her up and started hitting her back."

"My throat was closed. I was gasping for air," Carrero recalled.

When Romero's back strikes failed to get Carrero to dislodge the stuck food, Romero tried the Heimlich maneuver.

Despite not being formally trained, Romero said she tried to remember what she previously saw and read about it.



*Olga Romero (left) is viewed as a hero by co-worker Wanda Carrero.*

"In the beginning, I was fearful and nervous," she recalled. "I was scared and didn't know what to do. I had never done it before. I've seen posters and heard about it. But I've never been in a situation where I actually had to perform it."

Romero grabbed Carrero around the waist and then pushed in Carrero's stomach, just above the naval.

Attempting this a few more times, the blockage was dislodged and, fortunately, Carrero was able to exhale. Romero then walked Carrero outside the restaurant and gave her a glass of water. Carrero did not require any medical attention.

Carrero considers herself lucky to have a friend like Romero, who took action in such a difficult situation.

"I'm so thankful to Olga that she was able to help me," Carrero said. "It was a panicky moment. She's a hero. I thank her all the time. I keep thinking what would happen if she wasn't there."

Romero, who regards Carrero as a younger sister, demurs at the "hero" label, saying she just went with her instincts.

"I'm thankful I was there for her, but I'm not a hero," Romero stated.

George Robinson, administrator at Northern State, said he isn't the least bit surprised about Romero's actions.

"Olga is great. She is very professional and an asset to the department," Robinson said. "She is energetic and does her job well. Fortunately, she was there to help (save her co-worker). Otherwise, it could have been a bad scene."

In addition to her full-time position, Romero also works as a part-time education tutor at Northern State. She tutors in social studies, math, history and English.

"I love it," she said about working for the New Jersey Department of Corrections, where she started in 1988. "I love helping and supporting people, and I have awesome co-workers."

Carrero said she learned some things from the incident.

"I've got to slow down on my eating," she said. "I have just got to be more cautious."

Perhaps most important, she said, is not taking anything for granted.

"It didn't turn out tragic," she said. "I'm very fortunate to be here."







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## **Officer of the Year**

# Correction Officer Back on Duty After Recovery from Accident

In the weeks following a horrific accident on May 13, 2015, Senior Correction Officer Kyle Hand of Southern State Correctional Facility wondered just how drastically his life would change.

On that day, a sport utility vehicle failed to maintain its lane and struck Hand, pinning his left leg into the gas tank of his motorcycle. Hand, who had just exited the parking lot of a local fitness center, tried to steer clear of the oncoming vehicle by veering onto the shoulder. But the motorcycle's brakes locked, making the accident unavoidable.

Since the accident, Hand has had 10 surgeries to repair his shoulder, elbow and wrist. Most of the surgeries were successful. However, efforts to save his left leg were unsuccessful, which resulted in the biggest change to his body: the installation of a prosthetic leg.

Hand's physicians tried reconstructing the veins in his left leg, but the leg failed to fight off the persistent infections during the next few weeks.

"The muscles were already infected," he



*SCO KYLE HAND*

explained. "They basically took 90 percent of the muscle out of my leg."

The doctors presented Hand, who is 24 years old, with two options.

"They said you could either continue to try to fight off the infections, or you could get a prosthetic leg," he recalled.

Hand chose the prosthetic. He said it was a fairly easy decision, especially if he wanted to feel and walk again.

"I would have had a dead foot. If the infection spread, it would have done much more damage," Hand stated. "It would have been easier to walk with a prosthetic than a leg that you couldn't feel."

Despite that accident, Hand was determined to make a full recovery. As his recovery gained speed, Hand had planned to return to his job at Southern State, where he had worked since 2012.

"When I was in the hospital, they projected I wouldn't be home for two months," he said.

In fact, Hand returned home in just one month and attended intensive therapy sessions. Less than a year had passed when Hand returned to work on April 23, working his usual second-shift assignment.

The remarkable recovery earned Hand the facility's Officer of the Year honor. He was recognized at the PBA Local 105 Awards Ceremony, held May 20 in Atlantic City.

"He is unstoppable with this mental strength that he has," the award's statement reads. "Meeting him gives you an overwhelming feeling to never give up and to keep your head up."

Hand's duties remain the same at Southern State, where his father, Oscar, also works.

"I can still do any job at the jail," Hand stated. "I have no restrictions. I wouldn't have been hired back if I couldn't."

Hand pointed out that the recovery process was hardly easy. He worked hard on strengthening and conditioning exercises. He admits to falling a lot while learning to run again.

"I've had my times where I wasn't all there. I was down," he acknowledged about his physical and emotional state.

But Hand eventually regained his optimism. When he reconnected with his colleagues at Southern State, it felt as if all the hard work was worthwhile.

"They were all happy and excited. They wanted me to come back," Hand recollected. "I was very upbeat. One of my bosses joked that the accident didn't seem to change my ego."

Administrator C. Ray Hughes welcomed Hand back to the prison.

"A couple of days following Officer Kyle Hand's return to work, I visited him at his post," Hughes recalled. "As we talked, I noticed the smile on his face, his soft-spoken words and the calmness he displayed. That convinced

me he was happy to be back in the environment he loved most ... his job in the New Jersey Department of Corrections."

Major Barbara Rochow admires Hand's resilience and how he hasn't lost his ability to carry out any of his responsibilities.

"It's amazing how brave he is and what a fighter he is, after all that he had gone through," she observed. "His main goal was to return to work. He is doing his job just like everyone else. He is an asset to the department."

Hand credited friends and family for assisting in his recovery.

"I had a ton of them come by," Hand said. "I was never alone."

Added his girlfriend, Amanda Dods: "Just watching how quickly he was recovering really inspired me. It got me through that tough period. He is doing a lot better. He has the same schedule he had before the accident."

That schedule includes going six mornings a week to the same gym he was leaving when the accident took place.

"At first, we did everything we could to avoid that road," Hand remembered. "But I eventually started driving there again. We (him and Dods) joke about it, probably too much. I guess that's my way of coping."

While putting on his clothes requires a few additional minutes, and he needs to use a seat to take showers, Hand estimates he could do "98 percent" of the things he did prior to the accident. Driving is virtually the same, and he can walk and run without difficulty.

Hand said if he really wanted to, he could start riding his motorcycles again. However, he admitted he has no desire to do so. There also is another reason about his reluctance to return to what used to be his favorite hobby.

"I don't think my parents would be very happy with that," he said.

Still, he and Dods take part in other activities, such as fishing, kayaking and playing basketball.

After the accident and the grueling recovery, Hand knows one thing for sure.

"Don't take anything in life for granted," he concluded.





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## Shape Up

# Plenty of Ways - and Incentives - to Start an Exercise Regimen

Do I need to belong to a fitness center?  
Should I hire a personal trainer?  
Don't I need expensive exercise  
equipment?

The answers to all those questions is, "Not necessarily," said Michael Ritter, a New Jersey Department of Corrections Education Program Specialist who holds a degree in health and physical education. He said the key ingredients to effective workouts are having fun and making the commitment.

Ritter added that success is more likely when exercising with others.

"Research has shown that when people exercise as part of a group – like a bike club, runners club, tough mud runs – they are more likely to stick with their exercise routine," Ritter said. "Additionally, it has been shown that if you work out with a friend, you will be more successful with your exercise program and not give up. So grab a co-worker and start moving; you will feel better and make lifelong friends."



*Michael Ritter hosts exercise sessions in the Wellness Center at the Central Office headquarters.*

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends at least 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes each week of vigorous exercise. The AHA also suggests regular stretching to improve flexibility.

If you do prefer the confines of brick and mortar instead of outdoor activities, Ritter said that's fine. The key thing is what's comfortable for the individual.

"Hundreds of gyms in New Jersey now offer small-group exercise programs that promote the camaraderie of working out with other folks with similar fitness ability."

For NJDOC workers, there's an additional incentive: lower membership fees. Many fitness centers offer discounts to state employees, enabling them to enjoy everything from Swedish massages to Zumba to yoga at less expensive prices. To see which centers offer discounts, click on the "State Employee Discounts" link on the NJDOC intranet.

Furthermore, department employees have access to the Wellness Center, located in the Cubberly Building on the grounds of Central Office headquarters. It is there where Ritter has been holding sessions on his own time two days a week. His sessions are Mondays, from 1 to 2 p.m. and from 5:15 to 6:30 p.m., and every Thursday, from 5:15 to 6:30 p.m. These sessions are at no cost.

Ritter provides advice to colleagues about how to safely use exercise equipment, eating healthy and developing a customized regimen.

"We have tried to schedule sessions at times that are convenient for people to come," Ritter said. "Sometimes people can't stay after work, but they can make it during their lunch break."

"My goal is to provide an exercise program where, no matter what their level, they will see some results," he continued. "Some people don't exercise at a gym because they don't feel comfortable, or they feel they don't belong there, or they don't want to look silly not knowing how to use certain machines. I want to show them that this is not just for people who exercise regularly."

NJDOC Chief of Staff Judith Lang said the Wellness Center serves as a convenient outlet for employees to get some physical activity during the day.

"Many of our staff are sedentary during the day, especially those who work in an office," Lang observed. "It is a proven fact that a sedentary lifestyle can lead to all sorts of health problems. Routine exercise has been shown to improve a person's health, mood and stress level."

"I have always been a proponent of exercise," she continued. "The fact that we have access to a free wellness center is a benefit for all of our staff,"

Kerry Pimental, a section chief for the NJDOC Office of Community Programs and Outreach Services, often uses the Wellness Center during her lunch break, saying the workouts help her clear her mind and improve focus.



"There have been many times that I couldn't reconcile figures in a financial report and after returning from the Wellness Center, the error stood out clearly," Pimental recalled. "If I work through lunch, I often find myself editing and proofreading my letters and realize that I'm not really understanding what I'm reading. That doesn't happen if I use the Wellness Center on my lunch break."

For employees who are concerned about not having enough time to shower before returning to their desks, Pimental suggested weight training and ab workouts instead of the more intensive cardiovascular exercises on treadmills and similar equipment.

Ritter is optimistic people will stick to their exercise regimens for the long term, especially when they notice all the benefits.

"It helps reduce stress and allows you to sleep better and eat better," Ritter said. "You have a more positive attitude. You are more productive at work. Your health is number one. Once you start engaging in a positive behavior, things start to fall in place."





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## Summer Blossoms

# Horticultural Society President Impressed with Jones Farm Program

When he was named president of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) in January, Matt Rader had a plan of trying to get to know as many people as possible who are associated with the Philadelphia Flower Show, the annual event coordinated by PHS.



*On hand for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's visit to Jones Farm on July 25 (from left) are Debbie Mahon, teacher for the Jones Farm Horticulture Program; Jecrois Jean-Baptiste, director of education for the NJDOC; Matt Rader, president of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS); Betty Greene, volunteer manager of PHS; and Robert Buechele, administrator of the Central Reception and Assignment Facility.*

He had heard about the Jones Farm Horticulture Program, which since 2009 has won 156 ribbons at the show. At this year's show, which took place March 5-13, the Jones Farm program won 37 ribbons for the 35 plants it entered in a variety of categories. The entries included amaryllises and daffodils, among other varieties.

Rader wanted to learn more about the program and get a first-hand account by meeting the people behind it. On July

25, Rader did just that when he visited Jones Farm and toured the hothouse

and garden. He was amazed by the number, and variety, of plants and vegetables grown at the farm.

"It's a beautiful display they have in there," he said. "They are very carefully maintained."

He praised the program participants for their achievements.

"Thank you for what you do," Rader told them. "The beauty you guys create brings a lot of joy."

He also thanked the New Jersey Department of Corrections for the Jones Farm Horticulture Program, which enables inmates to learn valuable skills in planting and growing vegetables.

"You are helping people discover that talent," Rader said. "You are helping them find a place in their life."

Participants in the program were given certificates by the NJDOC Office of Educational Services for "astounding successful participation" in the flower show.

Some program participants asked about the actual judging at the flower show and just how rigorous it is.

Debbie Mahon, teacher of the Jones Farm Horticulture Program, joked: "They are a lot easier on you than I am."

Betty Greene, a volunteer manager with PHS, said the ribbons won at the Philadelphia Flower Show carry great prominence. In her opinion, winning an honorable mention ribbon there is similar to winning a first-place ribbon at many other competitions.

Greene explained that the judges don't know who is submitting an entry, as the plants are entered anonymously.

"They don't know anything about you. The plant is speaking for you," she said. "You're showcasing your work with everyone else, from all walks of life."

Mahon said the Jones Farm program's mission is two-fold. It's not just about working, she said, "but it's also designed to learn about successfully growing plants and vegetables."

Following the visit from PHS officials, guests were treated to zucchini and squash dishes made with vegetables grown on the farm.

After viewing the plants and garden, as well as savoring the locally grown foods, Rader said it's obvious why the program is effective.

"I'm very impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment they have shown," he said. "It's clear that they enjoy the work."





## Stress Management

SPRING/SUMMER 2016



# Experts Offer Tips on Navigating Stress in The Workplace

The impact of a prison environment on an individual's psyche can be staggering. Consider:

- A correction officer's 58<sup>th</sup> birthday is, on average, his or her last.
- On average, a correction officer will live just 18 months after retirement.
- The suicide rate for correction officers is 39 percent higher than for other occupations.
- The likelihood of divorce, domestic violence and substance abuse –including alcohol – is significantly higher for correction officers than for the general population.

"Correction officers work in a highly volatile and dangerous environment, so learning how to manage stress is essential," said Dr. Michael Pittaro, a 28-year criminal justice veteran.

Pittaro, a member of the faculty at American Military University, is a sought-after speaker who recently discussed issues surrounding stress management in the workplace during an address to the New Jersey Chapter of the American Correctional Association. New Jersey Department of Corrections Commissioner Gary M. Lanigan also spoke at that gathering, which was held at Mercer County Community College.



DR. MICHAEL PITTARO



DR. MECHELE MORRIS

"In law enforcement, we tend to internalize our stress," the Nazareth, Pa., resident said. "That's especially common in corrections, where we encounter the worst that society has to offer, which could create a clouded, cynical view of humanity. That kind of jaded view has a detrimental effect on inmates, on fellow employees and on ourselves. Negativity breeds negativity. It is important for officers to learn the cause of their stress and to develop strategies to reduce stress levels."

Stress is defined as a reaction to a stimulus that disturbs our physical or mental equilibrium. Symptoms in its most severe state can include behavioral issues such as anger and irritability, an increasingly disheveled appearance, frequently late arrival for work and sick-time abuse.

"The problems may start out small, but then they continue to escalate," Pittaro said "If ignored, these issues tend to manifest themselves in harmful ways – drinking, difficulty concentrating, not enough sleep. In Corrections, not only are there personal concerns, but there is the potential for safety and security problems."

Dr. Mechele Morris, director of training for Rutgers' University Behavioral Health Care (UCHC), has served as an instructor at the Correctional Staff Training Academy since 2005. She regularly emphasizes to the trainees the importance of taking care of themselves, emotionally as well as physically.

"They're taught to come in with their game face on, so to speak, to leave any issues they might have outside," she said. "It's as if they are supposed to solve problems, so they can't have problems. Unfortunately, everybody has problems. The key is to properly address your problems, and that's an area where Corrections professionals are sometimes lacking."

She continued, "I've gotten into the practice of telling the trainees that as soon as their benefits kick in, they should find themselves a therapist, because the best time to find a therapist is when you don't need one. That way, if you – or your spouse – ever need a trained observer to speak to, you'll know who to call."

Morris, a psychologist herself, is well aware of the stigma surrounding mental health issues. However, she argues, any stigma that exists cannot override the importance of an individual's well-being, especially in a field as demanding as Corrections.

"When it comes to mental health, we often just don't want to make the call," she noted. "If our blood pressure is up, or if we have the flu or diabetes, we get help. Why is that?"

Pittaro cautions that a "one size fits all" approach to stress management does not exist. However, there are no shortages of useful strategies. For example, Pittaro suggests that unnecessary stress can be avoided simply by learning to say no and keeping contact with stressful individuals to a minimum. He also recommends accepting that which you cannot change, adopting a healthy lifestyle, making time for hobbies and spending time with family members.



"Having outlets not related to your career can be especially helpful," said Pittaro, who holds a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Capella University's School of Public Safety Leadership. "I enjoy going to the gym, which provides both a physical and emotional release as well as a cool-down period. The list of possible outlets is diverse: ride a bike or a motorcycle, go fishing, work as a volunteer. Basically, you can engage in almost any activity that interests or relaxes you.

"Family time is also extremely valuable, and when you're with your family, make sure to compartmentalize," Pittaro added. "At work, I'm at work. When I'm home with my family, I'm with my family. I've heard people say, 'I just don't have the time.' Then make the time. Period."

Morris concurs.

"Pay attention to the phrase 'I used to...'" she suggested. "I used to coach my kid's team. I used to go to the gym. I used to drink less. Those are the things you need to watch."

Morris added, "It's extremely helpful to find someone you trust, someone who cares about you – a friend, a spouse, a parent, whomever – and ask him or her to let you know if you're changing. If that person tells you he or she senses a change, do something about it."

She said that if you suspect that a co-worker needs outside assistance, say something. She cautioned that your initial concerns are likely to be met with a harsh rebuff, but ignoring a potential problem could prove to be far more painful.

"At first, they might snap at you. So what?" Morris said. "Would you rather end up wearing a black band over your badge? I've heard people say that they thought their co-worker was having problems and that they feel a tremendous sense of guilt because they didn't act.

"Offer to get them help, and let them know you'll be there for them. When you say nothing, you feel awful, but if you persuade someone to get help, it's an entirely different feeling."

Both Morris and Pittaro urge those who feel the need for professional help in coming to terms with job-related stress to contact a qualified medical professional or to take advantage of a variety of resources through the workplace. New Jersey Department of Corrections staff members can call Cop2Cop (phone 1-866-COP-2-COP), the Employee Advisory Service (phone 1-866-327-9133) or the Human Resources representative at their institution. Assistance also is available from the Policeman's Benevolent Association, Local 105 (phone 609-396-8688).

